a salty crack. Yesterday Michael asked me for a cigarette. I said no. I mentioned that I'd noticed him sitting on the steps. I thought he was inconsiderate. He tossed what was left of his cigarette, nearly all of it. "Sorry," he said. In a man's normal speaking voice. I wish the camera could have caught it.

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It was a few minutes after 6 o'clock. I had just returned from the Goodwill down Thing Street. I removed my knapsack and put it on my porch, entered the narrow passage between my house and the House, and carried a green bag of garbage to the boulevard. Michael came out of the House and sat down on the front steps, where anyone else coming out of the House would trip over him. He was smoking as usual, taking rapid shallow puffs on his cigarette, which he'd throw away half smoked, or leave to scorch the mat.

He knew he annoyed me, sitting where Adam always told him not to. I asked him if he remembered how he knocked at my door on Sunday afternoon, to invite me to take him for a walk. I'd buy him a coffee at a coffee shop in the neighborhood where they had a glassed-in smoking section. He'd always say it didn't matter, he was quitting, but I always made sure I had a pack of cigarettes. The last time I also bought him a chocolate éclair. He said I couldn't imagine